

2014

## Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Michael Perini

George Mason University, mperini@gmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship>



Part of the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Perini, Michael (2014) "Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *Collaborative Librarianship*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship/vol6/iss1/8>

This Viewpoints is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collaborative Librarianship by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

# Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Michael Perini ([mperini@gmu.edu](mailto:mperini@gmu.edu))  
George Mason University

## Abstract

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a discipline that emphasizes instructional development and enhanced student learning through the dissemination of practitioner theory and experience. The discipline, however, primarily considers the role and perspectives of higher education and K-12 faculty. Yet SoTL also has pragmatic implications for librarians as it promotes instructional improvement, collaborative research, networking, and professional development across the academy.

Keywords: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; Networking; Professional development

## Introduction

In academe, I move between many established silos. As a student, I am a doctoral candidate in my university's higher education program. However, I have been a part-time student for the entirety of my program. Consequently, internships and research opportunities have been elusive due to time constraints. I am educated to employ higher education theory, but my personal experience and career path predicate an alternative view on the applications of that theory.

Also, my day job is as a researcher in a library. I am one of two individuals in my department with the title "Reference, Research, & Instruction Specialist." Since the title does not include "librarian," you might have assumed correctly that I am not a librarian. I work in the field and perform similar tasks to my librarian colleagues, but I approach research and reference issues from a higher education perspective.

Thus, academically and professionally I (somewhat by necessity) tend to view problems from an extra-disciplinary perspective due to my varied interests and positions. It is a beneficial situation though. At library staff meetings, for example, it promotes discussion and collaboration by providing unconventional analytical ideas to conversations and dilemmas. This is precisely the principal viewpoint through which the discipline of the Scholarship of Teaching and

Learning (SoTL) might thrive – the interdisciplinary approach. SoTL is a very young discipline that has not made tremendous headway into conversations on librarian roles and activities. Although it is primarily an instruction-based discipline, SoTL offers both philosophical and methodological approaches to productive collaboration for librarians.

## What is SoTL?

The late Chancellor of the State University of New York Ernest Boyer, often cited as a luminary in the development of SoTL,<sup>1</sup> traced the development of American higher education from a teaching focused profession to one that emphasized the role of research.<sup>2</sup> The research, though, was discipline-focused and inclusive. As a result, many of the benefits gained from instruction were kept on an isolated and individual level. Huber and Hutchings state, "Teachers have developed few habits or conventions for exploring what they do in the classroom and how it affects their students, or for sharing what they know with colleagues who might build upon it."<sup>3</sup> Basically, despite an emphasis on research productivity, instruction was one of the key components of a faculty member's role in the academic community. As Boyer notes, "Teaching is not well rewarded, and faculty who spend too much time counseling and advising students may diminish their prospects for tenure and promotion."<sup>4</sup> In reality, there was no medium to disseminate pedagogical meth-



## Perini: Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

odologies, especially if education was not intrinsically associated with a faculty member's specific discipline, such as biology or engineering.

In 1990, Boyer coined the phrase "scholarship of teaching," stating: "When defined as scholarship, teaching both educates and entices future scholars."<sup>5</sup> Boyer also emphasized the consideration of a variety of kinds of academic work and their active interfaces. Penn State Professor Emeritus of Teaching and Learning Maryellen Weimer specifically cited four advantages for analyzing such research from an open perspective:

A broad look at pedagogical scholarship potentially accrues four benefits: lessons about pedagogical scholarship for the disciplines to learn from each other; the power of well-established findings to advance the profession; more effective advocacy for those working to advance the teaching-learning agenda; and the power of reading widely to improve individual practice.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the acceptance of the validity of other disciplines and their approaches to teaching, a variety of research methodologies also were acknowledged. These include "wisdom-of-practice" scholarship (such as personal accounts of change), recommended practices reports, recommended content reports, personal narratives, as well as more conventional research scholarship, particularly qualitative, quantitative, and descriptive research studies.<sup>7</sup>

With the inclusion of a variety of research methods, SoTL grew from an inclusive disciplinary base to one that included previously unconsidered partnerships.<sup>8</sup> As stated by Nancy Chick, "The path of the development of SoTL has been its expansion from primarily disciplinary inquiries toward cross-disciplinary methods and questions."<sup>9</sup> Even though disciplines appear completely different, facets of instruction do interact in a sometimes unperceived way.<sup>10</sup> The interdisciplinary focus in turn expanded due to the preface that it would benefit the research and service aspects of a faculty member's responsibilities as it would expose them to alterna-

tive ways in which to distinguish teaching and learning.<sup>11</sup> As such, SoTL has gained popularity amongst faculty for several reasons that might work as well for librarians.

### SoTL Applications for Librarians

The first and simplest motive for a librarian to consider SoTL work is the altruistic. Exploring methods of teaching will inevitably provide an individual with more instructional bullets, so to speak. It will enhance the practitioner's ability to improve the learning outcomes of the students in their classes.<sup>12</sup> Weimer explains, SoTL is "a way of coming to respect [teaching's] difficulty and complexity and a way of discovering how much there is yet to learn."<sup>13</sup> This is especially important for librarians who might not have had any instructional training during graduate school.

Beyond that, individual librarians are also able to bridge academic gaps in knowledge through collaboration. Huber asserts, "The key- including what is produced by practitioners through the scholarship of teaching and learning- is the expansion of communities of practice around teaching and learning itself."<sup>14</sup> By discussing or writing about instructional methodologies with academic colleagues, individuals (including librarians) are networking and making professional connections. The methods are on equal footing, allowing for collaboration between disciplines without the necessity of a saturated knowledge of the field. Thus, biologists and historians may publish together respective of their familiarity with the stylistic preferences of their colleagues' field.

In terms of practicality, SoTL has the potential to make a librarian's job more manageable through the consideration of teaching and learning. Consider a newly minted librarian struggling to determine how to teach their specific class. Odds are good that at some point in the entire time of that course being taught, either at the same institution or elsewhere, difficulties or similar challenges emerged. If another librarian previously published their findings relating to these struggles (and more importantly how they overcame them), then it behooves the new professor to attempt a replication of the positive outcome.



## Perini: Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

SoTL is appealing because it is a malleable discipline. Since the field is relatively new by academic standards, many pedagogical practices within specific disciplines have yet to be explored. As well, there are even more possibilities for study when allowing for collaboration between disciplines.<sup>15</sup> Weimer again suggests, “You can use it to pursue answers to those questions that intrigue you. That’s energizing work; we are always motivated to learn when there’s a need to know.”<sup>16</sup> Given that the defined discipline of SoTL is so young, it is difficult to chart a prospective path for the future, but this is perhaps what attracts professionals to the field as it provides opportunities for a collegiate researcher to think on different intellectual plains. That expanded outlook may benefit all segments of their professional responsibilities due to the willingness to try new modes of growth and improvement.

Finally, a major stance that SoTL proponents advocate is a rigorous attitude regarding publishing and professional standards. “I feel that setting the highest possible standard,” Jeffrey Chin maintains, “insulates the scholarship of teaching and learning from the criticism it is evaluated according to more lenient standards than basic research.”<sup>17</sup> This is in part due to the need to establish SoTL as a viable discipline. By enacting similar publishing standards and requirements as those utilized by leading publications within specific disciplines, SoTL-minded journals and scholars can justify their validity in academe.

These conditions benefit librarians endeavoring to work with a SoTL mindset because the general disciplinary framework rationalizes the amount of time spent researching a specific pedagogical question; the findings will be published in a legitimate research journal. Those who work in academic libraries realize that librarians publish at a high level. Unfortunately, this is not always acknowledged by faculty colleagues in external departments. Due to the mixed responsibilities of librarians at different institutions however, librarians do not always emphasize their professionalism through publication.<sup>18</sup> This likely contributes to a misunderstanding of the role of the librarian around campuses.<sup>19</sup> Tenure-track faculty have to publish. An easy way for

librarians to gain their attention, if not respect, is to do the same. SoTL collaboration with departmental faculty then serves as networking and effective productivity all in one.

## Conclusion

Despite being a relatively new discipline, SoTL offers librarians the prospect of increased knowledge of cross-disciplinary instructional methods, collaborative opportunities, and abundant research possibilities. SoTL journals and conferences are expanding, and conceptual aspects, such as interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving, have been in effect for a long time. The field is in its infancy, however, and I often have to define the discipline for both faculty and librarians. Because of the research possibilities, though, there is potential and it is up to individuals such as myself to proselytize colleagues on the benefits of the field. The discipline is so new that many avenues of understanding have yet to be explored, which is perfect for a researcher approaching the end of a terminal degree, a librarian just starting out in academe, or the experienced professional with years of service.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen McKinney, *Enhancing Learning through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Challenges and Joys of Juggling* (Bolton, MA: Anker Pub. Co., 2007), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990), p. xii.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Taylor Huber and Pat Hutchings, “Building the Teaching Commons,” *Change* 38, no. 3 (2006): 26.

<sup>4</sup> Boyer, xii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Maryellen Weimer, *Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning: Professional Literature*



Perini: Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

*that Makes a Difference* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-43.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Reichard and Kathy Takayama, "Exploring Student Learning in Unfamiliar Territory: A Humanist and a Scientist Compare Notes," in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kathleen McKinney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy L. Chick, "Difference, Privilege, and Power in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Value of Humanities SOTL," in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kathleen McKinney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Reichard and Takayama, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Taylor Huber, "Balancing Acts: Designing Careers around the Scholarship of Teaching," *Change* 33, no. 4 (2001): 21.

<sup>12</sup> Kathleen McKinney, "Introduction to SoTL in and Across the Disciplines," in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kathleen McKinney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Weimer, pp. 196-197.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Taylor Huber, "Teaching Travels: Reflections on the Social Life of Classroom Inquiry and Innovation," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning* 3, no. 2 (2009): 4.

<sup>15</sup> Gary Poole, "Square One: What is Research?," in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kathleen McKinney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 136.

<sup>16</sup> Weimer, p. 170.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Chin, "Is There a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in *Teaching Sociology*: A Look at Papers from 1984-1999," *Teaching Sociology* 30 (2002): 55.

<sup>18</sup> Alain R. Lamothe, "The Importance of Encouraging Librarians to Publish in Peer-Reviewed Publications," *Journal of Scholarly Publication* 43, no. 2 (2012): 157.

<sup>19</sup> Association of College and Research Libraries, "Guidelines for Academic Librarians without Faculty Status," *College & Research Libraries News* 73, no. 3 (2012): 161-162.

